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Why Schenectady Was Destroyed In 1690.

A PAPER

Read Before the Fortnightly Club of Schenectady

MAY 3, 1897, BY

JUDSON S. LANDON.

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READ BEFORE THE FORTNIGHTLY CLUB OF SCHENECTADY

MAY 3RD, 1897,

By JUDSON S. LANDON.

On the night of the 8th of February, 1690, one hundred and fourteen Frenchmen and ninety-six Indians, after a twenty-two days' march from Montreal through the snow and the wilderness, stole in upon the sleeping village of Schenectady, then containing about sixty houses and three hundred inhabitants, massacred sixty of the inhabitants, plundered and burned all of the houses, except six, and on the following day set forth on their return to Montreal, carrying away thirty captives and a great deal of plunder, and leaving in destitution and helplessness such survivors as were too feeble to endure captivity or make their escape. The story has been often told. It is not the purpose of this paper to repeat it, but to attempt to group together the causes which, operating upon two continents, had as their incident or their result the destruction of Schenectady.

First, war existed between England and France. James II had been driven from the throne of England and had taken refuge with his Catholic protector, Louis XIV of

France. The great Dutchman, William, Prince of Orange, and his wife, Mary, daughter of the banished King James, became King and Queen of England. In French and Catholic eyes they were usurpers. Louis refused to recognize William as King of England. War was declared between England and France in 1689. There were other reasons for it than William's alleged usurpation. As Elector of the States General of Holland, he had, two years before, become the leading spirit of what was called the Augsburg League. This league was made between the States General of Holland, the Protestant princes of the Rhine, and the Catholic King of Spain, to resist the pretensions of Louis XIV to dictate to them, and possibly to crush them, one after another. A schism had arisen in the Catholic church between the Jansenists and the Jesuits. The Jansenists charged the Jesuits with debasing the standard of evangelical morality for the purpose of increasing their own influence, and the charge was reinforced by the fervor and genius of Blaise Pascal in his Provincial Letters—letters which are still famous, because they added a new glory to the French language, and new strength to the doctrine that true faith does not justify evil works; and the Pope, Innocent XI although he suspected the Jansenists of heresy, was jealous of the immense power of the Jesuit order. Louis took part with the Jesuits; and the Pope, in retaliation, gave his support to the Augsburg League. The Protestants joined the league, partly because Louis, in 1685, had revoked the Edict of Nantes, an edict under which such of the Protestants of France as survived the massacre of St. Bartholomew, in 1572, had had partial toleration for eighty-seven years. War had broken out between Austria and Turkey, and the Augsburg League became the allies of Austria, and France the ally of Turkey. William, by becoming King of England, was able to add England to the enemies of France. Thus it was that the armies of the Pope and of the Protestants of Europe, under the lead of the English-Dutch King William, warred against

the armies of the Crescent and the Jesuit faction of the cross under the lead of the great French monarch—a war that was waged from the Danube and the Rhine to the banks of the Boyne in Ireland.

Of course, among the objects of the war between England and France was the dominion of the North American continent, or at least that part of it which lies along the Atlantic coast north of the Gulf of Mexico and east of the St. Lawrence and the Mississippi rivers. The French had taken possession of the St. Lawrence and the Mississippi rivers and the great lakes of the St. Lawrence basin, and claimed title to all the land within the watershed of these rivers and lakes.

The English had their fringe of settlements along the Atlantic coast from the mouth of the Kennebeck as far south as Charleston, S. C. The Dutch had settled New York, and had pushed their settlements up the Hudson and Mohawk to Schenectady, with a few plantations five or six miles beyond. The Dutch had surrendered to the English in 1664, and the province of New York was now governed by the English. The province, however, was essentially Dutch, and Schenectady almost exclusively so. Apart from the war between the Dutch-English and French governments, the French and the Dutch and English colonies in America had their own cause of war, and that was their rivalship for the control of the fur trade with the Indians. The Dutch colony of New York was founded for the purposes of trade. Its primary object was to enrich the Dutch West India Company. There was no religious or political sentiment about it, as in the case of the early New England settlements. That the Dutch finally became more of an agricultural community, composed of people who wished to make homes for themselves in the New Netherlands, was a natural evolution, resulting from the fact that the monopolistic West India company was rapacious and tyrannical, and that it was soon found out that the farmer was surer of a comfortable living than was the hunter or trader.

Besides, the colonist could have all the land he could work. The Dutch were Protestants, and their notions of liberty were to be let alone. Father Jogues, writing of New Netherland, in 1646, says: "When any one comes to settle in the country, they lend him horses, cows, &c.; they give him provisions, all of which he returns as soon as he is at ease; as to the land, after ten years he pays to the West India Company the tenth of the produce which he reaps. * * * The English, however, come very near to them, choosing to hold lands under the Hollanders, who ask nothing, rather than depend on English lords, who exact rents, and would fain be absolute." But afterward the Dutch company became more exacting and the New England colony more liberal, so that when the Dutch colony surrendered to the English, in 1664, the intelligent Dutch farmer welcomed the change. He expected the government to be framed upon the New England models, and that he would keep what he had and get rid of the restraints upon his trade. The result was the Dutchman prospered and his tribe increased.

The French colonization of Canada had three objects—trade, dominion and the conversion of the Indian. That is to say, the French King wanted the dominion, the favorites of the King wanted the profits of the trade, and the Jesuit priests wanted the privilege and the service of converting the Indians; and these three purposes were skilfully combined and made co-operative.

There was not much royal control in the English colonization of that century. No matter what the language of the charter or commission to the royal governors, the colonists themselves either seized the helm of government, as in New England, or controlled, either by persuasion or turbulence, its movements, as in New York. The people took care of themselves, sought to make their own fortunes, and practically reduced the government to non-interference with their liberties.

French colonization, on the other hand, was minutely

regulated and restricted by the home government. The rate of increase was very unequal. In 1690 the province of New York had about 18,000. The New England colonies together about 150,000, while the entire French population of Canada did not exceed 12,000. Thus the aggregate of the English and Dutch people in New England and New York exceeded the French in Canada fourteen times. But the French province was under one government, while the English colonies were under several. The New England colonies formed a confederation for mutual defense, but New York stood alone until after the destruction of Schenectady, when, in May, 1690, the New England and New York colonies met by their delegates in Albany, and concerted measures for the common attack upon the French and defense against them. This was the first American Congress.

The French sought to compensate for their great disparity in numbers by making allies of the Indian tribes. This had been the French policy from the beginning, in 1604. It was the French policy to attract the Indians by trade, and to hold them by conversion to Christianity. The Jesuit priests were the missionaries, who zealously undertook the labor of converting the Indians. If successful, France would enjoy the profits of the Indian trade in times of peace, and have the support of the Christian, or "praying Indians," as they were called, in times of war. It must be said, to the lasting honor of the Jesuit missionary, that he was actuated by as consecrated and unselfish devotion to his sense of duty as the annals of lofty self-sacrifice record.

A chain of Jesuit missions was established from the Gulf of St. Lawrence as far west as the Lake of the Woods, and in these, far away from civilization and the faces of white men, the Jesuit priests, amid the squalor, dirt, indecency and misery of the savage tribes, devoted their sympathy, their labor and their lives to the salvation of the souls of these unregenerate children of nature. To aid in

snatching a dying soul from Hell's burning pit was with these earnest devotees the highest service in which life could be spent or sacrificed. With a self-denial that challenges the admiration of mankind, these men welcomed with delight the order of their superior, which bade them carry the emblem of the cross to the heathen.

Several of the priests kept a record of their labors and experience. These "Relations" remain to us. They are not only the amazing chronicles of the capacity of the human mind, when inspired and sustained by religious zeal, to rise above and remain superior to the most wretched and depressing surroundings, but they are also among the most complete and instructive descriptions of Indian life and character now extant.

The native tribes that inhabited the valleys of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa rivers and the northerly shores of the great lakes, were easily and strongly impressed by the picturesque symbols and the simple and zealous expositions of the Christian faith presented by the Jesuit fathers. Great numbers professed conversion.

The English and Dutch took little account of the Indians, except to protect themselves against them and profit by their trade. It is true that the English charters usually recited that one object of the colony was to carry the blessings of the Christian religion to the benighted savages, and it is true that a few devoted men, of whom Eliot was the most remarkable for successful results, and Brainard for self-denial, devoted their lives to the conversion of the Indians to the Protestant religion. With few exceptions the efforts made by the Protestants to convert the Indians were feeble and spasmodic, deriving their vigor from individual piety and zeal instead of from the government. The Indian mind and language readily lend themselves to symbolic and picturesque methods of thought and expression, but struggle vaguely with abstract conceptions when not thus illustrated. Thus the Catholic French succeeded far better

than the Protestant English and Dutch in their missionary labors. Wherever the Jesuit priest maintained his mission, there the fur trade with the Indians was secured to the French; there French policy prevailed, and the "praying Indians" became the friends and, to some extent, the allies of the French. Could this policy of conversion, friendship and trade be continued and extended, it was not difficult to foresee that the North American continent, from the mouth of the St. Lawrence to the mouth of the Mississippi, would be possessed by French and Indians, and governed by the French.

Opposed to the success of such a scheme of colonization were the English colonies on the seaboard and the Dutch-English colony of New York. But the most annoying, and at that time perhaps the greatest obstacle to the success of the French scheme was the Iroquois confederacy of Indians, the Five Nations of New York.

This remarkable confederacy, consisting of the Mohawks on the east, the Senecas on the west, with the Oneidas, Onondagas and Cayugas between, occupied what is now central New York, from the Hudson to beyond the Genesee. This confederacy of nations was the friend of the Dutch colony of New York and the enemy of the northern and northwestern races, who opened their villages to the Jesuits and gave their fur trade to the French. In 1643 the New York colony, Kieft being governor, very treacherously made war upon some Algonquin tribes who inhabited near Manhattan Island. The Mohawks claimed that these southern tribes were under their protection, and they avenged Kieft's treachery and waged a desultory war against the Dutch for five years and nearly exterminated them. In the end the Dutch made a treaty with the Iroquois, humiliating in its terms, but which really proved to be of the utmost service to them. The Dutch observed its provisions so faithfully and thereafter dealt with the Iroquois so fairly and kindly as to inspire them with respect

and affection. The English, succeeding in 1664 to the government of the colony, were wise enough to cherish this friendly alliance.

The Iroquois were a brave and warlike people. In systematic government and native intelligence they were far in advance of most of the northern tribes. They were kind and faithful to their friends, but practiced every savage cruelty upon their enemies. Their skulls were larger than those of any other tribe of aborigines in North or South America. Besides their resources of fish, game and furs, they permitted their women to cultivate plantations of Indian corn, beans and pumpkins. Manual labor, except in pursuit of game or the enemy, was unworthy an Indian man. Their power and prowess were respected and feared by the other tribes north of the Gulf of Mexico and east of the Mississippi.

From the first the Iroquois become the enemies of the French. In 1609, before Hudson ascended the river which bears his name, the Frenchman, Samuel Champlain, with two French followers and a war party of Hurons and Algonquins, marched southward from Montreal and came to the lake, which in like manner perpetuates the name of Champlain, and ascended it in canoes as far as Ticonderoga. There they met a party of the Iroquois and engaged them in battle. Champlain and his two French companions fired their guns upon the Iroquois, and thus brought upon them consternation and defeat. These were the first white men they ever saw and the first guns they ever heard. In 1610, and again in 1616, Champlain, as the ally of the Hurons and Algonquins, defeated the Iroquois by the use of firearms. It was plain to the Iroquois that unless they also could obtain firearms their long-established supremacy over all the other Indian nations was at an end. When, therefore, the Dutch came up the Hudson, the Mohawks received them kindly, partly because they were afraid of the guns of white men, and partly also because, when they discovered they were not Frenchmen,

they hoped to obtain from them the same kind of firearms which the Hurons and Algonquins had received from the French. Thus the Mohawks early found that the Dutch were as useful to them as the French were to the Hurons and Algonquins. The Dutch furnished them with guns and ammunition, and they soon regained their lost ascendency. The Mohawks and the Dutch north of the Catskills early made a treaty of peace at the Norman's Kill near Albany, and this treaty was observed, renewed and continued, with, it is true, occasional waverings and interruptions, until the breaking out of the war of the Revolution in 1775. The white man then abandoned his fealty to the King of Great Britain, but the Iroquois remained faithful to his long pledged alliance, and because of his fidelity to it his people were wasted, his hunting grounds were taken from him, and the remnant of his tribes became vagabonds in the land over which their fathers had been rulers.

As the French claimed all the watershed of the St. Lawrence valley, their claim embraced a portion of the Iroquois territory in northern and western New York. In support of this claim the French and Indian allies had made frequent incursions into this territory, but without any permanent success.

The French were also sedulous in their efforts to convert the Iroquois tribe to Christianity, as well as the Hurons and Algonquins. In these efforts many of the Jesuit priests laid down their lives—martyrs to their faith and sense of duty. The chief obstacle to their success with the Iroquois was that the religion they taught was so readily accepted by their enemies, the Hurons and Algonquins. In their wars against them the Iroquois spared neither priest nor convert. History preserves in reverent honor the names of Fathers Daniel, Lalemant, Brebeuf and others, missionaries to the Hurons, who perished by the bloody hands of the Iroquois. Among the martyrs was the saintly Father Jogues, whose monument in the form of a shrine to the

Virgin, "Our Lady of Martyrs," stands upon the southern bank of the Mohawk, at Auriesville, a few miles west of us, within sight of the windows of the passing cars of the New York Central Railroad. Father Jogues himself, in a letter still preserved, recounts in a strain of touching simplicity the tortures he and his companion, Rene Coupil, suffered while captives upon a previous occasion in the hands of the Mohawks, the death of his companion, and his own ultimate escape. But he afterward returned to the Mohawk country, hoping to convert the very savages who had tortured and maimed him. But the Mohawks, after wavering between accepting him as a teacher and priest, or condemning him as an enchanter, who had destroyed their harvests, finally adopted the latter alternative; they cut off his head, placed it on a pole with the face toward Canada, as a warning of the fate his imitators might expect, and threw his body into the river. This was in 1646, near the place where the shrine now stands.

But the zeal of the Jesuits was superior to their fear of savage cruelty. At last, in 1658, the Onondagas admitted the priests into their villages, and soon after the Oneidas, Senecas and Cayugas did the same. The Mohawks were less indulgent. They understood that to favor the Jesuits was to displease their Dutch friends at Schenectady and Albany. But the Jesuits finally won their way into the Caughnawaga (Fonda) family or castle, and succeeded in making many converts. In 1671 they induced most of the converted Mohawks to migrate to Canada, where in a new Caughnawaga, near Montreal, their descendants still remain. These converted emigrants were the "praying Indians," who, with the French, destroyed Schenectady in 1690.

The French, however, never succeeded in establishing a permanent foothold or influence among the great body of the Iroquois. The priests could not change their savage natures. The convert would revert. The French still continued their alliance and friendship with their Indian

allies, the ancient enemies of the Iroquois. Naturally strifes arose, and war followed in which the French were greatly reduced. In 1665 France was constrained to send a fresh regiment of troops to Canada to restore her fallen fortunes. They built a fort near where Lake Ontario discharges into the St. Lawrence, afterward called Fort Frontenac. This served to hold the Iroquois in check and as a base for the fur trade of the lakes.

In 1672 Frontenac became Governor General of Canada. He was a man of great vigor and skill. He speedily divined the Indian character, and conducted his affairs with the Indians with masterly address. Adroit in conciliation, where conciliation failed, he carried fire and sword. The Iroquois were astonished and alarmed at Frontenac's vigor and boldness, and it needed all the skill and address of the English to dissuade them from making alliances with him. Frontenac carried war into the Iroquois villages, with such success that he finally succeeded in extorting a treaty from them, which for a time at least secured a nominal peace. After ten years of his vigorous rule, Frontenac was recalled by his King in 1682, and remained away until 1689, when, war having been declared by England and France, the King sent Frontenac again to Canada, in order that he might have the benefit of his great abilities in wresting from the English their American colonies. Meantime the French government of Canada had perpetrated a great outrage upon the Iroquois. In 1687, the French, having invited fifty chiefs of their tribes to a conference at the French camp at Onondaga, the French seized them upon their arrival, and sent them as captives to France, where they were consigned to service in the galleys at Marseilles.

Those of you who have read Chateaubriand's Atala will recall how this outrage is made to furnish an interesting actor in that delightful story.

Exasperated by this treachery, the Iroquois the next year marched upon Montreal, held it from August until Octo-

ber, then destroyed it, laid waste the settlements in the vicinity, and returned home laden with booty.

The English Kings, Charles II and James II, were not ashamed to sue for and accept the bounty of the French King, Louis XIV. The natural outcome of this dependancy was that the English governors of New York were advised by their Kings not to be too zealous in resisting the French pretensions to the Iroquois territory and the French aggressions upon their tribes. But the English soon found out that the friendship of the Iroquois was their chief bulwark against French invasion.

Thomas Dongan was governor of the province of New York from 1683 to 1688, and he obtained the reluctant consent of James II to take the Iroquois under his protection as English subjects, whence it followed that he must protect them against French assault. Governor Dongan was a Catholic, but not a Jesuit. He was making preparations for an assault upon Fort Frontenac and the French military post at Niagara, when he was superseded, in 1688, by Edmond Andros, to whom James confided the government, not only of New York, but of New Jersey and all of the New England colonies. Governor Andros ruled the province through his lieutenant-governor, Nicholson. Governor Nicholson, following the New York policy, forbade the French to attack the Iroquois, and demanded that Fort Frontenac, at the eastern end of Lake Ontario, should be destroyed and the French post at Niagara abandoned. The French abandoned both post and fort. This testified to the Indians that the English were the superior power. It diverted the trade of the northwest from the French to the English.

It was when the French were thus humiliated by the English, and Montreal laid waste by the Iroquois, that Frontenac returned. He had not expected the situation that confronted him. He had arranged with the French monarch a plan for the capture of New York. Troops were to march from Montreal by way of Lake Champlain, capture

Albany on the way, and then assail New York by land, while the men-of-war despatched from France were to cannonade the city from the harbor. The two men-of-war sailed with Frontenac, and awaited on the eastern shore of Nova Scotia the journey of Frontenac to Quebec and Montreal, the collection of his troops, and the news of their departure upon their march toward New York. But when Frontenac learned of the invasion of his province by the Iroquois and the havoc they had wrought, he was forced to abandon the expedition against Albany and New York. With such forces as he could command he proceeded to the relief of Montreal. He again sought to terrify the Iroquois by threats of his vengeance, holding out at the same time offers of conciliation. The Indians affected to despise his weakness and to magnify the superior strength of the English. He could not pursue them to their homes in the wilderness, but he could ravage the frontier settlements of the English, and thus not only destroy them, but at the same time convince the Iroquois that he retained his ancient strength. He knew their respect and admiration for boldness and success, and he resolved to win it at the least cost and hazard to himself. He could still summon to his aid the "praying Indians." He directed a descent upon several English towns in New England and upon Albany in New York. In the incursion upon Albany the "praying Indians," who had been converted by the Jesuits at Caughnawaga (Fonda) on the Mohawk and were now living in the new Caughnawaga on the St. Lawrence, were found ready to take part. They knew the country; some of their own people had fallen in the Iroquois raid of the previous year, and they were willing to serve the French and eager to avenge their fallen brothers. The expedition was formed and started upon its journey. The toilsome march through the wilderness and the deep snow depressed the spirit of the Indians, and when they reached a point on the Hudson where the paths to Albany and Schenectady separated, they took the path toward Schenectady.

The recent political troubles in the Province of New York had contributed to render Schenectady singularly exposed to such an assault.

When the news of the abdication of James II reached New York, it was followed by confusion and anarchy. The adherents of William and Mary insisted that the governor appointed by James had no further authority, and they appointed a committee of safety who chose Jacob Leisler captain, and clothed him with the powers of governor, to be exercised until the new King and Queen should signify their pleasure. Leisler was of humble origin and of little education, and the aristocrats of the province would not recognize his authority. They still professed adherence to James, and rallied to the support of Nicholson, who was lieutenant governor under Andros. Governor Nicholson soon became so frightened that he sailed away to England, leaving his powers with his council. The political magnates at Albany would not recognize Leisler, and the people of Schenectady were divided in their sentiments, and though warned of their danger by the friendly Mohawks, still, incapable of union, they failed to obey either power and fell into anarchy and subsisted without any government. The result was that, though the village was surrounded by a stockade and had a garrison of eight soldiers commanded by a lieutenant, the gates of the stockade were upon this night of destruction left open and unguarded, and citizens and soldiers slept the sleep of the just. The destruction was nearly as complete as the assailants desired to make it. It was applauded at Versailles and Paris, as a blow both to England and to heresy, and it was recounted in the wigwams, castles and "long house" of the Iroquois as evidence of the mighty daring and prowess of the great Frontenac.

Governor Leisler's fate is of interest: It was a sad one. Instead of being commended for his zeal and courage he had the misfortune to be arrested upon the complaint of

his enemies, charging him with high treason in usurping the government; he was also charged with the responsibility for the massacre at Schenectady. In vain did his friends plead his loyalty to William and Mary, and his devotion to the welfare of the province. He was a Huguenot, and his enemies answered, that his real motive was hostility to the Church of England. He and his son-in-law, Jacob Milburne, who had vigorously aided him, his secretary, Abram Gouverneur, and five others, were convicted of high treason and sentenced to death. Gouverneur and the five others were reprieved, but Leisler and Milburne were hung, May 16, 1691, the gibbet being erected near where the New York *Tribune* building now stands. Their estates were also confiscated.

The new governor, Sloughter, supposing that an application had been made to William and Mary for their pardon, was unwilling to sign the death warrant until he should hear the result of the application. But Governor Leisler's enemies had suppressed the application; they then managed to get Governor Sloughter drunk, and then to procure his signature to the warrant, whereupon Governor Leisler and Mr. Milburne were hung before Governor Sloughter became sober. The parliament of England afterwards reversed their attainder and restored their estates to their heirs. Abram Gouverneur, who had been reprieved, married Leisler's daughter, the widow of Milburne, and he, being elected to the assembly, was chosen speaker, and succeeded in procuring the assembly to pass an act to pay Leisler's heirs one thousand pounds on account of the money which Leisler had expended in defence of the province.

My narration ends here. I am obliged to sacrifice detail to condensation, but I hope it is not uninteresting to you to recall that the destruction of this infant village was one of the results of the strife between the Christian and the Turk, the Pope and the Jesuits, England and the allied powers of Europe against France and Turkey, the alliance

of Pope and Protestant, the alliance of Canadian French with Hurons, Algonquins, and the Mohawk "praying Indians," the alliance of the Dutch and English of New York with the Iroquois nation, the strife for the dominion of the North American continent, and last but not least, the political dissensions in the province of New York that followed upon the abdication of James II, and the accession of William and Mary, King and Queen, of ever blessed memory.

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